

REMARKS ON THE PHILIPPINE MALLARD

BY S. DILLON RIPLEY

IN THEIR most interesting and provocative review, "The Family Anatidae," Messrs. Delacour and Mayr (1945. *Wilson Bulletin*, 57: 21 and 39), have briefly discussed the Philippine Mallard (*Anas luzonica*), expressing their belief that, together with *A. poecilorhyncha* (the Spot-bill Duck of the Asian mainland and Japan) and *A. superciliosa* (the Australian Duck of the southern Malaysian subregion, Australia, and the southern Pacific islands), it formed a single species.

Very little is known about *luzonica* in the wild state, as any perusal of books on Philippine birds will reveal. Nor are there any significant observations on the form in confinement. Aside from birds in dealers' pens, Philippine Mallards have been kept in captivity only by the late Mr. de Laveaga in California, Mr. Peter Scott (who still has one pair in England), and myself.

My observations on *luzonica* are fragmentary, but I present what I can at this time, as I have recently—by one of those appalling strokes of ill luck reserved for aviculturists—lost my breeding female to a Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), and thus have little chance of adding anything further of significance to this record. During the spring seasons of 1949 and 1950 two of my Philippine Mallards paired up, but unluckily I was away most of the time. However, I did manage to see the female frequently indulge in the sideways head-dipping familiar to all who have watched the Common Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and closely allied forms in display. The dipping was accompanied by a weak quacking of the general intensity and tone of a hen Gadwall's (*A. strepera*) or Pintail's (*A. acuta*). The drake did not indulge in distinctive posturing. He occasionally responded to the duck's head-dipping by swimming rapidly alongside her in a rather stiffly erect pose. He uttered no notes during this time. He was aggressive and indulged in violent chasing of any other duck, whatever the species, that ventured within twenty feet or so of his mate during non-feeding times. At feeding time he was also aggressive, but his radius of tolerance of approach was greatly reduced.

No eggs were laid in 1949. In 1950, at the end of June, four eggs were laid some distance from the water under a box placed on the ground in a covert of alder and willow bushes. The eggs were, according to the man who was caring for my birds, spherical, "like billiard balls," dull greenish-white, and unglossed. Mr. D. S. Rabor of Silliman University, Negros Island, in the Philippines, tells me that in his experience the Philippine Mallard lays only four eggs in the wild state. If this is average, it is an interesting example of reduction of clutch size in a tropical anatid species. The Spot-bill Duck lays a clutch of 8-10 eggs,

the Australian Duck 7-8 eggs normally. Exceptionally large clutches may occur in both these species (Phillips, 1923. "A Natural History of the Ducks," Vol. 2, pp. 90-91 and 103-104).

Unfortunately my Philippine Mallard eggs did not hatch well. Only one duckling emerged from the shell, and it died July 30, three or four days after hatching. It is now in the collection at Yale Peabody Museum (No. 11297). Miss Shirley Glaser's line drawing of it is reproduced herewith (Fig. 1).

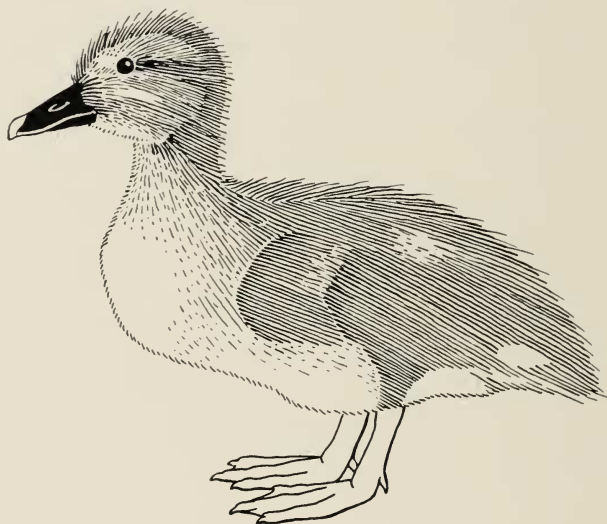


Fig. 1 Downy young of Philippine Mallard (*Anas luzonica*). From a drawing by Shirley Glaser.

The downy young of the Spot-bill Duck, the Australian Duck, and Common Mallard are nearly indistinguishable (personal observation; Phillips, *op. cit.*). A perusal of Figure 1 will show that the downy duckling of *luzonica*, on the other hand, is distinctly different from the ordinary Mallard-like duckling. The eye-stripe is interrupted in front of the eye, in this respect being like that of *Anas waigiensis* but unlike that of other species of *Anas*. The face is dark, shaded with rich burnt umber. The clove brown of the top of the head is carried down onto the neck to form a partial collar. The white spots on the back near the origin of the wings are very much reduced, only an indication, as is the faint strip of white marking the posterior edge of each wing. The spots on the sides of the rump are also reduced. The breast and upper flanks are shaded with hair brown.

I am not prepared to say that my four eggs were typical of this species. As a clutch they certainly were unlike those of the other Mallard-like ducks. The

coloration of my downy young bird is also strikingly different, in degree if not in basic pattern, from that of ducklings of other Mallard-like species. These juvenile characters and the rather distinctive adult plumage of the Philippine Mallard incline me to believe that *luzonica* is an old relict form and, as such, well worthy of full specific rank. As for *superciliosa* and *poecilorhyncha*, admittedly they are closely related to each other, but since *luzonica* to some extent separates them geographically, I submit that all three should be considered distinct species.

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NEW LIFE MEMBER

Edward L. Chalif was born in Odessa, Russia, on July 17, 1903, but he came to the United States when two years old. His travels have taken him to all 48 States; to the Arctic Circle and beyond in both the New World and the Old; by canoe to within a hundred miles of Hudson Bay; and to México. He studied geology and mineralogy at New York University. During World War II he was a Captain in the U. S. Army. Trained as a dancer, he was asked by the renowned Pavlova to join the Ballet Russe, but he became a professional dancing teacher instead. His interest in birds was roused by an American Museum display exhibited in his public school. He is now a member of the A.O.U., the

Cooper Club, the Linnaean Society of New York, the B.O.U., the B.O.C., and the Société Ornithologique de France. He has spent the past summer in the field gathering material for his forthcoming guide to Mexican birds.

